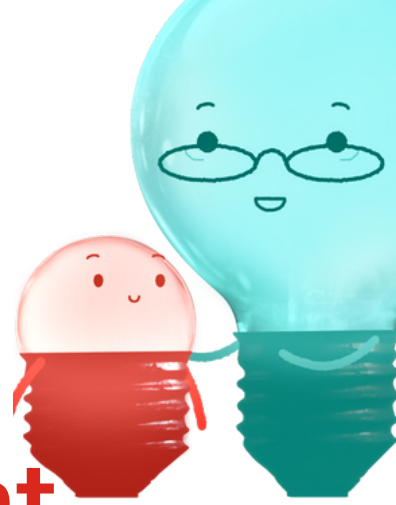


The Impact of COVID-19 Disruptions on Early Literacy and Language Development



A child's language and literacy skills are shaped by the world around them – at home, at childcare and school, and in the community.

Each one of these areas has been disrupted in some way by the COVID-19 pandemic. That, in turn, is affecting the development of early literacy and language skills for many children.

Understanding the impact is key to addressing it as we continue to move forward – to support children who may have missed important windows of learning.



In the first year of the pandemic in particular, childcare settings and schools were closed to minimize the spread of the virus, and learning moved online. When they did re-open, everyone had to adapt to changes with the in-person learning environment.

Reading levels dropped.

- In March 2021, Toronto District School Board showed that approximately 55% of Grade 1 students in virtual school were not reading at grade level, compared to 45% pre-pandemic.



Children missed out on learning from facial cues.

- Many teachers, early childhood educators and children, wore masks in order to protect against the virus.
- Research has shown mask-wearing poses challenges for young children because watching the way other people's mouths move is one of the earliest ways that babies (as young as 8 months) learn language and speech. Masks have made it harder to see facial expressions which is important for learning to understand language and meaning behind what people are saying.
- Online education was difficult to access. Young children often have limited attention spans, making it difficult to focus for long periods of time online.
- Creating a language-rich environment online for a large group of students under 6 years can be challenging for many teachers.
- Technology can be a barrier. For instance:
 - Not everyone has reliable internet. 1.2% of Canadian homes with children don't have any access to internet services.
 - Not everyone has a device that their children can use for online school. 63% of low-income homes are more likely to have less than one device for each household member compared to 56% of high-income households.



Daycare/kindergarten enrollment decreased.

- 60% of children under age 6 were in regulated or unregulated childcare in 2019, compared to 52% in November 2020 to January 2021. That represents a drop of 8%.
- Some school boards reported kindergarten enrollment dropping, meaning that many children missed that crucial first year of school.



Please visit www.childrensliteracy.ca for more tips!



Canadian
Children's
Literacy
Foundation

Fondation pour
l'alphabétisation
des enfants
canadiens



The Impact of COVID-19 Disruptions on Early Literacy and Language Development



Lockdowns meant many families spent more time at home, which affected their children's language and learning environment.

Screen time went up dramatically.

- An increase in screen use is associated with lower language and literacy scores in preschool.



Physical activity levels dropped.

- Physical health and well-being are key aspects of a child's readiness for school. Physical activity levels affect both physical development and mental health, and students who are active tend to have better grades, school attendance, memory, and ability to stay on task in the classroom.



Families faced social, emotional and financial stresses.

- Evidence suggests that the pandemic may have increased levels of work-family conflict and alcohol use among couples whose children were homeschooled.
- Stresses like these can lead to more conflict in the home, use of harsh words, and yelling or shouting. When parent-child interactions are unstable, or even when children think their parents are in distress, children tend to face more barriers to the skills they need to be ready to start school.



Public services received by families were closed or limited, or they were moved online, affecting children's overall development.

Babies' hearing problems may have gone undiagnosed.

- Hearing is very important to the development of speech, language and early literacy skills. Due to hospital restrictions, newborn hearing screening programs were postponed in some areas, like Ontario. Delays in testing can result in learning about and addressing a hearing problem later.



Children with disabilities missed out on at-home programs.

- At-home programs for children with disabilities and their families moved online. Virtual sessions lack the rich, interactive qualities of in-person sessions, meaning children with disabilities were not exposed to all of the cognitive, emotional and social benefits of face-to-face learning.



Fewer children and families are accessing health services.

- This matters to a child's early language and literacy because developmental delays are often identified during routine checks by the primary care physician or when the family raises concerns with the healthcare provider.



For more information on early literacy and language development, please visit the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation at www.childrensliteracy.ca.

Document prepared August 2022 based on available data.

Please visit www.childrensliteracy.ca for more tips!



Canadian
Children's
Literacy
Foundation

Fondation pour
l'alphabétisation
des enfants
canadiens

